

Track 1: Planning Theory and Methodologies. Towards an ‘Ethics of Responsibility’

Session 6: Laboratories of citizenship

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Collective learning experiences in planning: the potential of experimental living labs

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‘Living labs’ originate from an R&D environment, and intend to innovate commodities by experience-based knowledge, with a direct involvement of users. Meanwhile, the living labs approach has been shifting into a wider range of applications, and has also ended up in the toolbox of actor- and action-oriented planners. The approach is (implicitly) promoted as a new and better way of combining capacities of different stakeholders by exploring and experimenting in real-world situations. In this paper, we attempt to critically discuss the use of the living lab approach. The first section explores the potential thereof for planning issues: How univocal is the concept of Living Labs? How much do different interpretations and practices of Living Labs resemble in terms of actors involved, actions stimulated, processes promoted and criteria for good practices accepted? The exploration is based on the experience of two experimental living labs, which are compared with a range of international examples. The second section turns to a series of alternative approaches in spatial planning in Flanders: How do the aims and means of these collaborative learning experiences differ? What is the role of users and how important is experimentation? What is the innovative contribution to planning (if any)? How do the practices deal with path dependencies and uncertainties in complex multi-actor settings? We will answer these questions based on research seminars on ‘collective learning’, which are organized for the Policy Research Center Spatial Planning in Flanders, as a part of a work-package which focusses on methodologies for future explorations.

Keywords: collective learning, living labs, urban region, co-creation, Methodology

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The Political Meaning of Informal Urbanization: Cross-national comparisons on the political economy of informality

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Democracy's success depends not only on the ability of formal institutions to respond to the legitimate demands and rights of citizens. It also depends on how these citizens are able to enter the political realm in order to claim their rights. Exclusion from formal political structures has deep-reaching consequences and is reflected on the built environment. Informal urbanisation may be the physical expression of the absence of rights and deficiencies in the rule of law. In this sense, informal urbanisation is not a pragmatic solution for the lack of formal housing in developing countries, but the sign of non-inclusive political systems. Informality can therefore be seen as the expression of exclusion from the rule of law and the protection it offers to citizens.

However, these forms of exclusion can also stir up the political awakening of the urban poor. Vibrant socio-political movements originating in informal settlements in cities of the Global South are sometimes rather effective in demanding their rights, forcing governments to improve the livelihood of citizens. Urban informality can thus become a vehicle for social, economical and political emancipation and lead to the democratisation of governmental institutions.

This article explores the mutual relationship between the struggle for political inclusion and processes of informal urbanization in different socio-political and cultural settings. It investigates the theme of democratization and political emancipation in relation to processes of informal urbanisation. It aims to provide planners with a comparative critical reflection on the relationship between the political economy of places and processes of urbanization.

Keywords: Informal urbanisation, Political economy and governance, Struggles for rights and democratisation, Democracy building

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The Art of Creating Consistency: Planning Strategies in the Age of Active Citizenship

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This paper addresses the emerging practice of civic initiatives in urban development, and the challenge for professional planners to find adequate strategies in dealing with this form of ‘active citizenship’ – strategies that reach beyond the inclusionary and disciplinary confines of participatory planning approaches. Based on empirical studies of 14 civic initiatives in Denmark, the Netherlands and England, a theoretical hybrid of complexity theory (self-organization), actor-network theory (translation) assemblage theory (individuation), and recently developed post-structuralist planning theories, this paper argues towards a planning strategy that *does* fit the age of active citizenship. The paper argues that planners should no longer focus on organizing involvement in formal planning processes or setting up frameworks to counter fragmentation. Instead, planners should focus on *creating consistency* between the redundancy of spatial interventions and planning strategies that evolve from active citizenship. Creating consistency is based on three lines of thought: the need for conditions that do not constrain, but rather *open up* possibility spaces, the need for a facilitating planner who does not mediate but rather *navigates* between planning initiatives, and most importantly, a *flat ontology* of planning strategy. This flat ontology states that there is no a priori or ontological difference between the intentions and performed behavior of planning actors (including civic initiatives). This paper illustrates that, by opening the spectrum for many others, navigating between emerging initiatives, and being able to empathize with the behaviors and strategies of many others, potentials for consistency can be recognized and acted upon.

Keywords: Civic Initiatives, Self-organization, Consistency, Planning Strategy

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De Roo, 2012

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De Landa, 2004

Latour, 2005

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Engaging action research with urban planning practice in identifying new courses of action for sustainable urban development

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New workable approaches to urban sustainability are often explored within temporary and interdisciplinary project structures located outside direct formal jurisdictional authority and every day planning practice. In this context multiple examples of cross-border collaboration can be identified where researchers engage with urban practitioners in knowledge production processes also popularly coined as modus 2 or action research. There is a great need for critical reflection on the methodologies applied in specific contexts of collaborative knowledge production in order to get a better understanding on how to arrive at actionable conceptions of urban sustainability. I

take my point of departure in the Interreg project Urban Transition Øresund (2011-2014) involving urban planners from five municipalities and an interdisciplinary team of researchers from five research institutions all located in the Øresund region. The project has been set up with the ambition to develop models for collaboration and approaches to work more thoroughly with sustainability in urban planning processes. Based on my findings from being a research participant in the project I claim that action research can support the creation of inter-collegial spaces of social learning to discuss professional values, norms and challenges around sustainability. But what also has become apparent during the project is how the normative drive for enhancing democracy through collaborative knowledge production may be obscured by competing conceptions of participation based on the logics of the knowledge economy (e.g. Phillips 2011) as well as they may be pervaded by internal conflicts of different knowledge interests among researchers and their partners.

Keywords: Urban sustainability , Urban planning, Action research, Cross-border collaboration

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